



August - Preventive Health Month

The habits of flossing, food first - supplement safely, and sleeping

Commanding Officer's Message

Preventive health focuses on what can be done to prevent disease, illness, and injury by promoting healthy habits for a lifetime of good health. This August, our HP Toolbox will focus on three areas often overlooked.

We invite commands to motivate and educate their Sailors and Marines on three health promotion topics that are low in investment and yield potentially high returns. The focus topics this year are flossing, supplement use (food first, supplement second), and sleeping. For little to no extra cost of time and money, adding flossing, eating the recommended number of servings from the [five food groups](#) (before supplementing), and getting seven hours of sleep or more each day can reap health benefits and potentially prevent ill health.

What can leadership do?

Why Floss? [The Fleet and Marine Corps Health Risk Assessment from 2013](#) indicates that more than 40% of respondents do not floss regularly. Flossing is an important aspect of oral hygiene. Flossing must occur regularly to avoid plaque. The buildup of plaque can lead to gingivitis, the first stage of gum disease. Signs of gingivitis include inflammation of the gums, red gums versus pink, and bleeding.¹ In addition, plaque buildup can also lead to cavities, taking time away from duties for dental care. **Provide command support for making floss available to all of your service members through command health professionals. Flossing is part of being fit and ready for service.**

Why Choose Food First, Supplements Second? Supplement use through liquids, powders, and tablets is often seen as a way to improve performance or as a quick fix for a poor diet. As the Food and Drug Administration does not regulate supplements, there is no guarantee that the products are safe or effective, making Sailors and Marines vulnerable to supplement marketing ploys. **By emphasizing to service members the importance of making wise food choices each week, the hazards of supplement use may be avoided. Consider using the [Go for Green®](#) program to help your Sailors and Marines make healthier food choices.**

Why Sleep? Repeatedly, the importance of sleep comes up in the news and research. When compared to civilians, active duty service members are more likely to suffer from insomnia and short sleep duration due to stress, environment, and job requirements.² Lack of sleep can cause



decreased productivity and impaired cognitive function and also put service members at greater risk for accidents.³ **Promote a regular sleep schedule among Sailors and Marines. A well-rested service member is a ready service member.**

For more information on the HP Toolbox, please visit us [here](#).

¹ American Dental Association. Gum Disease. <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/g/gum-disease>. Accessed 8 May 2014.

² Mysliwiec V, McGraw L, Pierce R, et al. Sleep disorders and associated medical comorbidities in active duty military personnel. *Sleep*. 2013;36(2):167-174.

³ Banks S, Dinges DF. Behavioral and physiological consequences of sleep restriction. *J Clin Sleep Med* 2007;3:519-28. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1978335/>. Accessed May 2014.